

ANNUAL ARTS ISSUE

# BREAKING GROUND

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**2 children with autism in our world looking at the world inside the aquarium**, Ginger Wilson

Ginger Wilson lives in Loudon. She says, "They loved being in our world and have come so far with their autism. TIPS, Health Department CHADS, Homebound Head Start, Pre-school in Loudon County, private therapy and Tennessee Early Intervention helped to grab these two children and bring them back into our world."



**Untitled**, Taylor Reese

Taylor Reece is 14 years old, a member of the Cleveland Blue Raider Marching Band, Bradely County Multiple Sclerosis Society Junior Caregiver of the Year and runner-up in the Church of God Junior Talent Competition for Photography.



**Cover art: Summer Radiance** by Bernadette Resha

Bernadette Resha has become well known in the art community worldwide, exhibiting in numerous art galleries and art and craft shows. Ms. Resha lives in Nashville.



**Untitled**, Mary Jane Swaney

Mary Jane Swaney has supported art workshops at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and she and her late husband, Robb Swaney, also supported Easter Seals and departments at Vanderbilt that work to provide for everyone, as far as possible, the opportunity to live a rewarding life. Ms. Swaney believes that all of us need a helping hand at times.



**Animals Coming Off a Boat**, Triston N. Taylor

Triston N. Taylor of Tullahoma is 12 years old and has autism. He uses the Paint program on the computer. Mr. Taylor is self-taught and likes to do his drawings on the computer so he can fix his mistakes more easily.



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## CONTACT INFORMATION

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# A PROGRAM OF ETTAC'S HEARTSONG CENTER FOR ACCESSIBLE MUSIC & ART

*By Dr. Lois Symington*

"Green, green, the green machine. . ." sang 41 children, as they blended their blue and yellow silk ribbons in time with the music. In a six-week program that combined musical excellence, focus on Tennessee State Curriculum Guidelines, multi-sensory learning, accessibility and inclusion, children with and without disabilities participated in the eXceptional Orchestra (XO).

Under the expert guidance of conductor and program director Kimberley Kredich, children, their families, community volunteers, professional musicians, artists and teachers gathered each Saturday morning from mid-January until the first of March to focus on working together to create XO.

The musical genre of the 2008 XO was jazz and an original piece of music in four movements was created by Cary Masters, an experienced musician and composer. The children composed one movement, an improvisation based on musical notes that were splattered on a large canvas staff. Another movement was inspired by the musical vocalizations of a young girl named Amanda, who has developmental disabilities.

As children learned concepts such as musical notation, they also received hands-on experience with different instruments. They also made their own heart-in-a-box instrument. The outside of their boxes represented things that people know about them; the inside of the boxes represented things they love. In a final performance in March, 2008, the XO children played their heart-in-a-box instruments in the premiere performance of "The Brush" that also included members of the University of Tennessee Jazz Orchestra.

When asked what this experience meant to him, one parent said, "Initially, I was reluctant to have my child with a disability participate in the program. I was concerned it would be yet another avenue to promote a false sense of disability awareness. After week one, I realized it was a

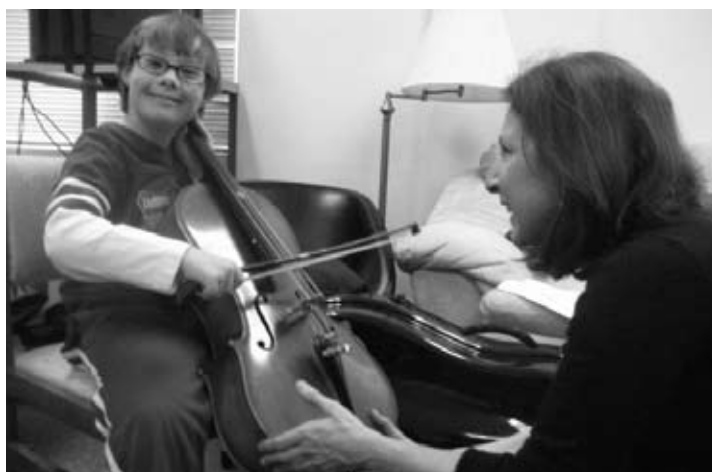
wonderful opportunity for all three of my children to participate together in a program that catered to each child on their level."

The eXceptional Orchestra is a creation of Kimberley Kredich, BA, MM, New England Conservatory of Music, that infuses visual arts, drama, dance, movement, music and accessible musical instruments into rehearsals and performances designed to allow children with and without disabilities to experience the enabling power of the arts. The XO was developed as a result of Ms. Kredich's desire to create a quality and inclusive experience for children.

As a parent of a son with autism, who is also musically talented, Ms. Kredich searched without success for inclusive programs for children that supported their unique needs and skills and recognized, respected and challenged their abilities. Many children with disabilities are blocked from community activities and programs, partly by perception that they are unable to participate and partly by lack of access to the facility or program (the "X" – arms crossed, children blocked). Music and the arts change that perception, in part because of the way that they tap into unused or under-stimulated parts of the brain (the "O" – openness, acceptance).

The eXceptional Orchestra is one of the primary activities of the HeartSong Center, which is part of the East Tennessee Technology Access Center (ETTAC), located in Knoxville. Other activities include workshops for teachers and parents that help them learn how to make music and art accessible; the Learning about Freedom curriculum, which uses music, art and literature of the Civil Rights movement to teach children and adults with and without disabilities about their rights; and KidsFest, an annual celebration of children's art and music.

ETTAC staff and educators, Alice Wershing and Lorrie Willbergh-York, have created the Learning about Freedom curriculum. In the Summer of 2006,



Volunteers, parents, and children learning dance movements designed to promote hand-eye coordination, with instruction provided by Fay Campbell, dancer. **Right:** Alex and teacher, Alicia Randis-Hooker, experimenting with a cello.

they worked with Guy and Candie Carawan, nationally known folk singers and civil rights activists, to teach children with and without disabilities about their rights. Through songs, personal stories and literature that included Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, these children began to develop concepts of their own dreams and rights.

One young boy with cerebral palsy, through the use of a head switch and Classroom Suite software, wrote, "I have a dream . . . that someday . . . I can live by myself." Using an adapted survey instrument, Mss. Wershing and Willbergh-York were able to measure changes in skills and knowledge of these children that included vocabulary such as "freedom" and "rights" as well as their knowledge of famous people from both the Civil Rights and Disability Rights movements, such as Rosa Parks, Nikki Giovanni and Ed Roberts.

Learning about Freedom is now implemented in area libraries and after-school or Saturday workshops, and includes area musicians, artists and writers. As with all of ETTAC's programs, including the HeartSong Center, these workshops are inclusive and accessible.

The HeartSong Center was founded in 2003 as part of the celebration of ETTAC's 15 years of service in East Tennessee to develop and promote accessible and inclusive arts programs. In ETTAC's work with hundreds of children with disabilities over the years, staff and families have learned about the power of music and the arts in learning, communicating and demonstrating potential that might be hidden behind more visible disabilities.

Dr. Lois Symington, ETTAC's executive director, learned that her son could memorize words when they were set to music and that her son (now an adult) could sing the words to T.S. Eliot's poems, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, although he had tremendous difficulty reading them. It was a joyous day when they sang and read together, "Jellicle Cats come out tonight, Jellicle Cats come one come all . . ."

The HeartSong Center programs have been made possible largely by generous funding from the Tennessee Arts Commission, the Arts and Culture Alliance, the East Tennessee Foundation, Target Corporation and Variety – The Children's Charity of Eastern Tennessee. Matching funds have been raised by individual and corporate donors and supporters of the HeartSong Gala for the Arts.

For more information on ETTAC and its HeartSong Center for Accessible Music and Art, including 2008-2009 schedule of programs and activities, go to [www.discoveret.org/ettac](http://www.discoveret.org/ettac).

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Dr. Lois Symington has been executive director of ETTAC for 20 years; adjunct professor for Tusculum College; member and supporter of local arts organizations; parent of a 34-year-old son with disabilities.



## TO FORGET I HAVE MS

*By Susan Addison*

Reflecting on the time before MS was a constant companion in my life is a comfort. Sweet remembrance fashions those thoughts into a kind of MS mantra—not a requiem for what has been lost—but rather a quiet yearning coupled with a boisterous song of gratitude in remembering the miracle of healthy human function.

This is how it would be  
...to forget that I have MS

To begin the day with coffee  
...minus the meds

Seeing only one image  
...without shutting an eye

Upright and active, moving all day  
...quickly with grace and without holding on

To rise  
...without stumbling

To walk  
...without fear

To bound up the stairs  
...mind solely on purpose  
...on feet that are warm, with no threat of numbness

To climb in and out of a tub full of bubbles  
...and dress without needing to pause for a rest

Selecting shoes because they are pretty  
...then tiptoeing unnoticed into a room

To take turns in quick conversation, to think without effort  
...remembering each thought

Words flowing without interruption

To speak with a voice strong enough to be heard and  
to laugh aloud without losing my breath

To sleep when it's time  
...absent of pain

And dream of tomorrow, planned without doubt

To blessedly take all this for granted is..  
To forget that I have MS

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Susan Addison is a special educator who enjoyed a long career assisting infants and toddlers with special needs and their families. Now retired due to progressive multiple sclerosis, Ms. Addison enjoys writing, drawing, painting and spending time with her husband and three children in Chattanooga.

# A MOTHER'S LOVE

By Sheri Grigsby

**K**athy sat holding her new baby and thanking God for her little miracle. The little girl in her arms was perfect. Or so it seemed.

As the days turned into weeks, Kathy's baby began having eye infections that made the baby cranky. Kathy took her to the doctor and tried everything under the sun, but to no avail.

After a few months, Kathy started noticing that her little girl wasn't following toys with her eyes, like the other babies in her neighborhood did. There were no more eye infections though, and the doctors didn't seem to think there were any problems.

## SISTERS

By Justin A. Taylor

My sisters are my strength, happiness, and my sadness.

They show me their love by crying when I got my brain injury.

Also by the way they hug me.

The sadness in me is when I got hurt.

I know I broke their hearts and that makes me sad enough to cry.

I was sad the day they moved away.

The strength comes in when I let them go on with their lives and I tell them I'll be fine.

I have to move on too.

I got through my disability for my sisters.

The best thing my sisters gave me is hope by living on for my nieces and nephews.

I know I have to live on for my sisters' kids.

So I can watch them grow.

My sisters help me with my disability.

All three of my sisters are beautiful inside and out.

Because of my injury all my sisters are nurses now.

Justin Taylor lives in Sidonia and writes about the people who help him in his life. Mr. Taylor is a traumatic brain injury survivor.

By the time the baby was six months, she was crawling. She crawled to the edge of a stairwell in a house unfamiliar to her and promptly fell down the entire flight.

Once Kathy's baby reached nine months she was walking. There seemed to be a slight problem though! When at home, Kathy's pride and joy did fine. She toddled around the house without any problems. However, when someone came over to visit, Sheri would tilt her head and listen to the incoming visitor. She didn't run to greet the person unless that person first spoke and sounded familiar to her.

Kathy thought nothing of it. The doctors were giving Sheri a clean bill of health. During this time Kathy would visit family and friends, carrying her toddler along.

In homes where Sheri wasn't familiar she continued to get hurt. Running into coffee tables more than once and falling over things. Kathy was alarmed and took the toddler back to the doctor.

The doctors told her there was nothing wrong with Sheri's eyes but she kept persisting.

After about two months, the doctors tired of her constant visits and placed Sheri in a straight jacket to do extensive tests on her eyes. Twenty-two-year-old Kathy was horrified at their obvious lack of empathy for her first born. Eventually she was forced to leave the room.

Finally the verdict was in. There was nothing wrong with Sheri's eyes. Without psychological tests, and only Sheri's obvious problems with running into things, the doctors concluded that she was mentally delayed. Kathy was surprised. Sheri spoke clearly and in complete sentences by 15 months and had been on schedule with every milestone listed in her books.

Kathy took her daughter home and decided that she was the mother and knew more than the doctors did. They were wrong. She kept up the nagging visits and constant questions until Sheri was four years old. At this point, a specialist did find a problem with Sheri's vision. It wasn't her eyes, it was her retina.

The new specialist told Kathy that she had been around someone with Rubella while pregnant with Sheri. She didn't have to contract it herself and, even though it caused little problem to Kathy's body, the growing baby inside was affected.

Kathy was relieved that the problem had been diagnosed. Now all she had to do was raise her daughter in the best way she knew how.

From the beginning, Kathy was forced to decide what she would and wouldn't allow her daughter to accomplish without assistance. She decided her daughter would be given the freedom other children had.

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*Untitled*, Virginia Piper

Virginia Piper lives in Chattanooga and is the program coordinator for Education and Transition Services at the Arc of Hamilton County. Ms. Piper provides mentoring and training to families who have children with disabilities in grades pre-K-12. She says, "I am a single mom boasting four beautiful children the youngest of whom is George."



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Kathy decided to never stop her daughter from doing anything that her heart was set on doing. She first tried public schools. She didn't want Sheri to be treated differently than other children. But after a year and a half Sheri was miserable. The teachers wouldn't allow Sheri to participate in most of the classroom activities for fear she would get hurt. So she would return home from school angry and depressed. In the late 70s, there was not much experience in vision loss in schools.

Kathy finally had enough. She swallowed back her own fears of a state residential school for the blind and, after moving her entire family to a home just blocks from the state school, she enrolled Sheri in the first grade.

From then on, Sheri thrived in a school environment. The headaches that had plagued the seven year old were gone. She didn't try to see things that were impossible for her to see. She learned to read Braille within a few months.

Sheri continued to grow and try everything that she could to terrify her mother. She learned to ride a bike and decided she wanted to be on the school's swim team. Kathy went to the first swim meet. Seeing her forty-five pound seven year old swimming in ten foot water almost did her in. Gripping the railing, she bit back her fear and let her daughter swim. She never let Sheri know just how many times she had to stop herself from jumping over the rail and into the water.

As Sheri grew she was never treated differently than Kathy's other two daughters. All three girls played outside, stopped the ice-cream truck and all the other normal things small girls do. Kathy never let on that she was going from window to window, inside the house, to insure the safety of her daughter.

In high school, Sheri decided she needed real world experience and wanted to try a public school. Of course, she picked the biggest one in town and Kathy was again faced with decisions.

Eventually, the drastic social changes Sheri met at the new school proved too oppressing. She missed the track team and her friends. To her mother's suppressed relief, Sheri returned to graduate from the school for the blind.

Kathy gave her all to her daughter by letting her fly free of the restraints of a disability. She never allowed her fear of the unknown to hinder her child's perception of the world or herself. By way of letting go and stepping back, Kathy gave Sheri everything she needed. That is the most extensive definition of love I know and the best thing a mother can give her child.

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Sheri Grigsby is a Partners in Policymaking graduate ('07) from La Vergne. Ms. Grigsby is an AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) worker with the Tennessee Technology Access Program.



# GOODBYE, MOM

By Dena Gassner

Standing in the bedroom, I looked down to button my white linen pants. The pants are drawstring with a single button. I had chosen them because I knew the flight home (coupled with the tension of the journey) would demand the comfort of their light-weight, silky feel. The button was missing. My brave front began to dissolve.

Enormous waves of grief threatened to breach my emotional hull. I swallowed the abuse, the love and the issues that would never be resolved yet again. My husband had called to tell me, "Mom doesn't look good. I think you need to come home now." I was coming home right now.

When raising kids with autism, all parents worry about our kid's "thing". When I am gone, who will cut his nails? When I am gone, who will tell the nurses 'no needles'? I wonder if my mother worried about my "thing". When I am gone, who will sew Dena's buttons?

I have never sewed a button. Mom is my seamstress. For 48 years, with nothing but the most meticulous attention to detail, she made 200 Barbie dresses (100 for my sister and me each). I remember seeing her use a pencil to push the sleeves back in after she sewed them.

She sewed my hems, buttons, clothes, costumes and my wedding veil. Within days, my seamstress would no longer be available for service.

I tried subduing the waves with an Ativan. My son, who lives so well with autism and seems to understand more logically that death is part of the "circle of life," was in the next room watching TV. He knew I could not maintain with too many questions. Mock composure was the glue that would hold us both together for the next hours of packing and planning; mock composure and better living through drugs.

I was slow moving. This is unusual for me. Travel usually pumps up my adrenaline which helps me focus, important for a woman with autism. But this was not the excited positive stress I thrive on; I was going home to say goodbye. Under this stress, my central sensory system (vision) had already shut down. When vision shuts down, the others become more intense. Patrick's TV noise was nearly unbearable. I had to actively talk out loud to myself to block out the mowers outside. The Ativan was not calming me; instead, I was foggy from anxiety. I could not concentrate; I could not identify items in the foreground from the background.

Then there was a shift. I decided to pretend I was going to one of my many professional development training events, somewhere sunny. I felt myself 'check out' and everything just became a rhythmic hum. My packing became more automated and reverted to rote status. We likely would have had only underwear or no underwear whatsoever, had those entrenched habits of compartmentalizing and banal packing not kicked in.

Meanwhile, my supposedly non-empathic teen remained quietly engaged in TV, self-initiating many of the "getting ready" tasks for which he usually waits to be prompted. His prompt dependency is becoming less and less about autism and more about teenager-itis. Calmly and quietly, he cooperatively pressed on.

My friend Betsy (an adopted sister in my autism family and a friend for life) picked us up for the airport. She came without hesitation, appearing from

her car, beautiful without even trying, with her tank top on inside out. I suppose that sharing a friend's grief makes even neurotypicals disorganized. I could see from the look on her face, which included a crooked smile (the kind that happens when you want to cry with someone but you are holding back), that she was working really hard to be helpful.

When we travel, we fly standby everywhere. It's a week after the ASA conference in Flagstaff, mid-July and peak travel season. The chances of us getting on this flight are about a million to one. The Ativan now blissfully combines with the sensory fog and it is a gift; it keeps me from plugging into this anxiety provoking scenario. I think I said "family emergency" at some point during check in because the gate agent asked something about "emergency" in response. I can't recall the dialogue that resulted in that exchange. It was rote.

Perhaps angels were surrounding us or maybe company does "take care of its own" when it can. Not only did we get on, we were seated in the bulk head seats. Gratitude filled me. These are little planes and I could not have managed Patrick's customary complaining about small planes.

Creatures of habit, Patrick and I automatically did what we do on planes. Patrick pulled out his chocolate milk and Nintendo DS. Since I try to read at least one research book a week, I had just grabbed this week's and left.

Crap.

Battleheim; as if his stuff is not hard enough, I was in the middle of reading Battleheim. I guess other people would have picked a nice fluffy magazine, but I can't change books until one is finished. I was stuck reading Battleheim on a plane to Kentucky to watch my mother die.

Rick met us at the airport. Now that my safety net was accessible, the fog lifted. I was still not emotionally connecting, but my awareness of the world returned. Upon seeing him, my heart ached for my husband. I could see how bad it was. I have seen that face many other times; when the dog died, when the bird died, when the rabbit died. He is on the opposite side of the emotional coin from me, raw side up. When I arrived, I knew pretty much what I was in for. For the last 12 years, she has been connected to an oxygen tube. In the past 6 years, it was 24/7. She had COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) from two rounds of tuberculosis and years of smoking. These illnesses and bad habits caused asthma and then emphysema.

Steroids are used to treat respiratory disease. Her lungs were so weakened she had to use the steroids several times a day just to breathe. Steroids accelerate bone density deterioration so now she was a poster child for osteoporosis, hunched over in ever increasing pain.

The contortion was now so profound that her upper body was barrel-like, and crushing her internal organs. The discs in her back and neck were collapsed to bone-on-bone status, making each day a marathon of pain killers and perseverance.

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Dena L. Gassner lives in Franklin, where she is the director of the Center for Understanding. This piece is a condensed version of the first chapter of Ms. Gassner's book, *Mom's Memoir*.





***Mother and Child detail***, Kathleen Walker

Kathleen Walker lives in Memphis and was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome at the age of four. Ms. Walker is a young woman transitioning from youth to adulthood and hopes to study art therapy in college "so that I can help to unlock the mysteries of the Asperger's mind."



***Singing Praises***, Jacquelyn Ousley

Jacquelyn Ousley is a resident of Memphis, where she participates in the Turning Point Peer Support Center. This picture reflects her belief that faith and hope are positive aspects of mental health recovery. Her picture was purchased by Freida Outlaw, Ph.D., of the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities and is used with permission.



***Flower Pops***, Derrick Freeman

Derrick Freeman, who has autism, began to express his perceptions of life and everyday living through his drawing and artwork from the age of three. Now 18 years old, this Knoxville native has been featured in local newspapers and television shows and is listed in the 2008 Black Pages East Tennessee.





***Radnor Reverie*, Kathy Tupper**

Kathy Tupper, a resident of Nashville, has seven years experience as an advertising art director and 16 years as a commercial artist for the Metro Nashville Government. Ms. Tupper also has done community art murals and business shows. *Radnor Reverie* to her is, "Peacefully spiritual in visual memories of nature."





**Gost**, Andrew Michleski

Andrew Michleski is 40 years old and lives in Kenton with his wife. He is continuing his post-secondary education, majoring in Mathematics with an emphasis in Special Education.

## SEE ME

*Vicki R. Pruitt*

As I walk down the hall,  
See Me.  
Don't turn your face away,  
See Me.  
Let your eyes meet mine,  
See Me.  
Give me that silent human greeting,  
See Me  
If You smile, I may smile also,  
See Me.  
You can say hello, I might answer  
See Me.  
Give Me what others give You free of charge  
See Me.  
Let Me be human too,  
See Me.

Vicki Pruitt is the patient rights advisor at Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute.





**Purple Lady**, Lisa Hodge

Lisa Hodge is an artist with Creative Expressions Visual and Performing Arts Program in Greenville. Ms. Hodge loves to overlay multiple colors.



**Kitty in the Window**, Audrey Buckman

Audrey Buckman of Columbia says, "It makes me happy to make art." Ms. Buckman is a member of the ReConnect Columbia Peer Support Center.



**Untitled**, Christy Wells-Reece

Christy Wells-Reece is a Partners in Policymaking graduate ('01), two time winner of the Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee Spirit Award, Bradley County Multiple Sclerosis Society Caregiver of the Year, mother and wife.

# WHAT, THE CURTAINS? (THIS I HAVE LEARNED)

*By Susan Addison*

Who knew it took so much brain power to put together a tasty southern meal or even a simple grilled cheese sandwich?

The timing...  
The sequencing...  
The spilling...  
The fumbling...  
The smoke and flames...  
The forgotten ingredients...

When did cooking become a scene from a Monty Python movie?

When did opening a can, cutting an apple, or lifting a bowl from the cupboard become such a farce? Setting a paper plate somewhere other than the burning stovetop element has suddenly become a memory challenge. Hanging on to a knife or attempting to stay upright as you put something in the dishwasher has become a comedy of errors—sometimes even involving blood. I irritate and, yes, even amuse myself!

## **I have learned that...**

a timer proudly set, (just as the neuropsychologist instructed) then left for hours in the room from which I have just wandered, is not all that helpful.

## **I have learned that...**

the cat will adequately and repeatedly lick up all the food I spill.

## **I have learned...**

to go to the bathroom whether I think I need to or not before entering a room that has the potential for producing the sound of running water.

## **I have learned that...**

I really don't have to pick things up the instant they are dropped. Rather, I have learned to wait and see what else ends up alongside the first item. At the end of my task, I have learned to sweep it all together with a broom then retrieve, wash, or discard at will.

## **I have learned that...**

it's better to keep a few small pots and pans where I can easily reach them than to decide it's not worth the trouble to make lunch.

## **I have learned that...**

chips can survive being tossed, rather than placed, high up into overhead cupboards. (I really don't need chips anyway.)

## **I have learned that...**

toppling over and becoming entangled in the lid to the kitchen trashcan even has its humorous side.

## **I have learned that...**

The world won't end when ovens are temporarily left on or refrigerator doors are left open.

With all I have learned, one lesson still managed to take me by surprise. Alone in my kitchen, surrounded by the falderal resulting from my attempts to make lunch, I was feeling a little embarrassed. I wondered whether my adult son, arriving home unexpectedly, understood that I really was going to pick up all of the mess at the end of my preparation. Still, I had to laugh when upon turning around I was reminded that during my efforts to open a window to let out the smoke, I had actually managed to knock down the kitchen curtains. Not to be dissuaded from my policy of picking up everything at the end of my preparation, I had left the curtains hanging awry, one end clinging for life on the rod at the window. I can only imagine what my son must have thought seeing that it is possible for a grown woman to create so much chaos while simply making a lousy sandwich.

Thankfully my son and I have shared several similar misadventures and managed to find the humor in them. Rather than becoming annoyed with the mess I have made, my son finds a way to make the situation amusing, even as he begins to help me clean up. What might provoke annoyance in others perversely sets the scene for us to enjoy a good laugh. For this I am grateful.

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Susan Addison is a special educator who enjoyed a long career assisting infants and toddlers with special needs and their families. Now retired due to progressive multiple sclerosis, Ms. Addison enjoys writing, drawing, painting and spending time with her husband and three children in Chattanooga.

# LIVING & LOVING LIFE

## THROUGH GOSPEL MUSIC

*By Diana Fedinec*

**R**ickey Frazier is a very spiritually and religiously connected individual with an abundant desire to communicate his inspirational beliefs through music and song. He loves the fellowship of the local church, which is where his natural talent for singing gospel music was born. With the help he receives from his direct support staff, Mr. Frazier regularly attends worship services and visits local churches to perform. He also sees his church members on a regular basis, prays with his support staff and is very uplifting to the people he knows.

Through his involvement in Shelby Residential and Vocational Services' (SRVS) Community Participation (CP) Program, Mr. Frazier has formed many relationships with others in his community who share the same spiritual beliefs. The CP program offers service recipients opportunities to explore their communities through various activities, outings, volunteer participation and job exploration.

Mr. Frazier lives for church and brings his own style of worship to everyone he meets. "I love to go to church and sing," said Mr. Frazier. "This is what I live for. But I try to bless and pray for everybody I meet. When I sing, I sing for God and for you and for all of us."

Cherry Davis, director of community participation, says that Mr. Frazier's personality touches the soul. "Rickey has the uncanny ability to make anyone feel good," said Ms. Davis. "He has an enormous insight into how your day might be going and always offers a kind word of encouragement. Seeing Rickey is nothing short of being miraculously energized."

With a passion for gospel music and the ability to fearlessly perform gospel songs, Mr. Frazier began calling the local disc jockeys of gospel radio stations in Memphis. When he was in his early twenties, he performed with a gospel music group called the Memphis Harmonizers. He still stays in touch with members of the group, who he often sees at local gospel events and at the radio stations he visits.

Today, he has become so well-known that his phone-in presence is like clockwork – you can count on him to be heard over the airwaves just

about every Friday morning. Mr. Frazier typically alternates every Friday between calling the radio stations from his apartment and being driven to the station by his direct support staff for a live broadcast.

One of his favorite radio stations is WMQM AM 1600, where he got his start in the business. Dr. J. Anderson, the station's program director, remembers his very first encounter. "Rickey simply called me up to be on the show and I could not resist," recalled Dr. Anderson. "I could tell he listened to the radio and was a very religious person."

That call was made when Mr. Frazier was 18 years of age. He's now 45, and still looks forward to being with his friends at the station every other Friday. Disc jockey Mike "Super Double J" Moore often goes on the air with him. "It's amazing to see how gifted he is in communicating with people," remarked Mr. Moore. "He's not shy about bantering back and forth with me, and he loves to send out praises and take calls. He's truly an inspiration to all the staff."

Mr. Frazier's spirituality often translates into giving him the courage and tenacity to pursue his own goals. With a firm belief in himself, he began networking with friends from one of the local gospel radio stations in order to produce a CD. With the help of the CP program and Mr. Earl Myles and his wife Benita - owners of the recording studio, Twin Tower Entertainment - Mr. Frazier was able to fulfill a lifelong dream by recording and marketing his very own gospel CD entitled, "Rickey Frazier and Friends...It's Finally My Time!" His CD was so popular, there are none left for sale.

Mr. Frazier's perseverance in keeping his dream alive as a "preacher" and gospel radio singer has been duly recognized. In 2006, he won the Individual Achievement Award of the Tennessee Community of Organizations and, in 2007, the Mid-South Arc Artist/Performer of the Year Award. This year, Mr. Frazier is scheduled to perform at the Spirit of SRVS auction event, a premiere city-wide fundraiser for SRVS with an expected attendance of 500 plus.

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*Diana Fedinec is the public relations manager for SRVS. She has worked at SRVS since September of 2005.*



Rickey Frazier records his very own CD at a Memphis recording studio. **Below:** Gospel disc jockey Mike Moore and Mr. Frazier listen to callers at the WMQM studio.





## ART & CONNECTION COME IN MANY COLORS

*By Courtney Taylor*

**F**our people who use wheelchairs are guided to the front of the crowded room. Their caregivers pick up long wooden poles and secure them to each wheelchair. Attached to the poles are blue, red, purple and gold sheer and shimmering fabrics as long as the room itself. The caregivers slowly push the chairs to the opposite side of the room and, as they do, the fabrics follow, flowing silently and seemingly never ending.

Many of the people in the crowd watch intently. Some turn their heads toward the fabric and others drop their heads to their chests. Some laugh out loud and some wiggle in their wheelchairs as if keeping rhythm with the flow of the fabric. The people are residents of Clover Bottom Developmental Center (CBDC). They are gathered for the Annual Memorial Service to remember the residents who died in the previous year and they are participating in a “color prayer.”

“Color prayer is a way of talking without words,” says CBDC’s pastoral care provider, Patricia Pickett. “When I first began my ministry at Clover Bottom, I didn’t have a clue how to connect. What I do now came from trial and many errors. Most often, when I visit each of the people in my care, I bring a little bag with colored scarves. For some of them, it announces that something special is going to happen. ‘What color is God for you today?’ I ask. I have learned that speaking in color is the only way some of my people can carry on a conversation. I have learned that the color they select has great meaning for them in that moment. We ‘pray’ together through the color.”

Rev. Pickett was hired as a pastor for CBDC residents in 1997. Immediately, she realized a traditional “preach a sermon on Sunday” ministry would not be effective for many of her congregants. So, she redefined her role as a pastoral care provider and began using art and color as a means of connecting. She uses art as a tool to guide them in making connections -

connections with the meanings of certain words or concepts, connections with the life and the beauty within themselves, and connections with others and the world around them. Making connections is what Rev. Pickett defines as true spirituality.

"When a person is engaged in the act of creating," says Rev. Pickett "their physiology changes. Being immersed in the act can change a body's physiology from one of stress to one of deep relaxation, from one of fear to one of inspiration. Many neurophysiologists argue that art and prayer are associated with similar brain wave patterns, mind and body changes, and they all are deeply connected in feeling and meaning. Art and prayer connect people with their inner world of imagery and emotion, of visions and feelings. This journey inward into one's spirit can be deeply healing."

Rev. Pickett's first project with the residents involved squirting paints onto t-shirts. She remembers the residents were hesitant to participate, and eventually she came to realize that they were scared of getting dirty. Many had been taught all their lives not to get dirty. Even once they were assured that it was okay and were engaged in the project, she noticed one resident cried softly through the process. Rev. Pickett realized the resident's heart was opening that day and that it was set upon the road to healing.

Rev. Pickett and her congregants eagerly began embarking upon art project after art project. There was and is no budget for materials, so they use "found objects." Rev. Pickett collects sticks and walnuts from the woods surrounding her house. She never cuts anything down. She uses only materials the natural world has shed.

In addition to the tactile arts, the residents also have a liturgical dance troupe comprised of individuals who use wheelchairs. Last year, an intern created a labyrinth and took one foot print from each of the participating residents to place on the path. The idea being: "We walk together." Rev. Pickett recalls one resident's experience of the labyrinth:

"She uses a wheelchair and is always itching to get out, but she cannot. She never stops moving. Well, when she went through the labyrinth we noticed that she stopped at one point and leaned over one side of her chair reaching down to the ground becoming motionless. She stayed there still for a long time. After quite a bit of time, our intern noticed that she was reaching down and touching her own foot print. She remained there so calm and so still. She was connecting with herself in that moment."

Rev. Pickett decided to connect CBDC residents with the community when she entered pieces of their artwork for consideration in the Frist Center for the Visual Arts exhibit, "The Artist's Voice: An Exhibition of Tennessee Artists with Disabilities." Nine pieces were selected for the exhibit. This would be the first time these artists would be connected and involved in the community outside of CBDC.

"When we went to the opening at the Frist, I was so happy to see the reaction of our people when they recognized their art on the walls," remembers Rev. Pickett. "I watched through tears as one woman stood in

front of her sculpture and exclaimed, 'My picture...my picture!' While the art these people are creating is beautiful as object, the process of exploration is the true focus. For many of these people it has been a statement of freedom. For many of them, our praying/creating together is the first time in their lives that they are able to claim something as their own creation."

Rev. Pickett's pastoral commitment to using art as nonverbal prayer allows her to communicate and to connect with individuals who might not have an opportunity to connect otherwise. She believes the act of creating encourages silence and stillness that, in turn, allows for grace and for transcendence. Their time spent together is a place where they can just be, where they can connect and where they can decide for themselves what color God is for them that day.

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Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination at Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, and is a graduate of Vanderbilt Divinity School.

i  
i DANCE  
that i may  
feel free.  
i PAINT  
to express  
how i feel.  
i GIGGLE  
in that  
i can bring JOY.  
i CRY  
because  
i care.

**Amy Dittmar**

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Amy Dittmar is an enthusiastic artist with diverse interests and talents. She is very active in the Creative Expressions Visual and Performing Arts Program in Greeneville. Ms. Dittmar loves to write about her passions, as illustrated in this poem.



## FULL CIRCLE *By Angela Braach*

My boys have a disability; two boys four years apart.  
The journey we've shared is about to conclude.  
The doctors, the meetings and society's glares;  
the minutes, the hours and the sleepless nights.  
I've fought for acceptance, I've preached interdependence.  
I've advocated for laws supporting dignity and justice!

My boys are men now and they have been taught well.  
They stand up for injustices for themselves and for others.  
The years have gone by and as nature would have;  
I . . . now am considered "disabled".  
As natural as it is, our world misses  
the value of elderly humans.  
I fight to remain as independent as possible.  
I want to have purpose, some control and acceptance.  
The day has come when the doctor has said;  
"she doesn't have much to offer society, she's old and a  
burden, put her away to protect herself  
and others . . . your time and energy is more valuable.  
By the way, call us back if we can help you any further."  
He stood to leave and I waited with guarded breathing . . . for words  
I prayed my boys would share.

My watery eyes met the two men in my life;  
and I heard words that were  
fiercely devoted to a cause much bigger than my life.  
"The doctors, the meetings, society's glares;  
the minutes, the hours and loss of sleep.  
We're here for you mom as you were there for us.  
We'll fight if we must.  
We'll demand acceptance for the world to be just!  
You taught us how to fight the good fight, now rest for a while . . .  
As we stand up for your rights!"

Partners in Policymaking graduate ('06) Angela Braach, of Murfreesboro, enjoys writing, reading and speaking about human issues. She is passionate about helping people love who they are.

## THE PATH OF LIFE *By Daniel Mirtes*

On a dark, gloomy night, Down the wonderous path, I stroll. Footsteps on the blue-black pavement, I stomp happily, and naturally on. Behind me, back-leads a large city, a city where I am greatly risen from. When I walk forward, the one thing all around me; on the sidewalks, on top of the buildings, even on my head, was trees. These town trees are desperate for me, like I am desperate for them. Just then, I felt rather correct on this path.

After I got away from the trees, (and got rid of the one on my head because it was heavy...) I continued down the path and accidentally kicked a purple metal vase with sword-shaped rims and silver rims on top and bottom. I picked it up and looked at it...It reflected back my life since the day that I was born. After the reflection, I carried the vase with me.

Inside the vase, I found a shiny golden old-fashioned key with horns all around the ring hole except the top. Just then, I realized how smart I used to be when I looked at it. It was like an education treasure. I chose to take the key with me, so I put the key in my pocket for safe keeping. (I am also carrying the vase too...)

Continuing down the lane, I came upon a bridge over a small blue glittery-watered lake. For a minute, I questionably stared at it, thinking of the water like love, but I didn't care. Unknowingly, the vase started sucking all the water up, and then spurted all the way to Africa. After that, I stepped over the waterless moat and resumed walking.

I then walked through a pair of woods, A random bear, golden and shiny, came out and jumped me. I was about to be eaten, so I held my key out for defense. Just then, the bear stopped and started acting like a dog, begging for it. I threw the key to where the bear fetched it. Unfortunately that didn't work. It jammed the key back at me, walked up to me, threw 46853 pies at me, and flew away to heaven. That bear was just plain dumb. I continued walking the path.

I've come to a point where I am almost home which was all the way at the top of the hill! Though, I made one stop at a time, never continuously walked down the path. But without further ado, I rushed down the path when all of a sudden, I came upon a big 3 sqmi. Wide dip so deep, you will end up in China, and die an ancient Emperor and Kung fu master. It was my dead end, until I found a talking crane. I asked it to build me a bridge...and after it did it fell down the hole. I thanked it and reached home. That is my journey down the path of life.

Daniel Mirtes is 15 years old and a sophomore at Ravenswood High School in Brentwood. Diagnosed with autism at age 2 ½, Mr. Mirtes is outgoing and enjoys writing music and playing piano and bass guitar.

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*Creation*, Dan Tracy

Dan Tracy, who has a Master of Fine Arts degree, lives in Shelbyville and belongs to ReConnect Shelbyville. Creating art is his life and lets Mr. Tracy express God's love, God's creation. He works in watercolors.





**Hospital Bracelets**, Susan Addison

Susan Addison is a special educator who enjoyed a long career assisting infants and toddlers with special needs and their families. Now retired due to progressive multiple sclerosis, Ms. Addison enjoys writing, drawing, painting and spending time with her husband and three children in Chattanooga.

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